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SUBJECT: MOHR OPERATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY

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Classified By: Deputy PolCouns Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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11. (C) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) operates 14 governorate offices throughout Iraq (excluding the KRG); they are overseen by the director general for governorate affairs, Ghanim Al-Shemari. The Ministry has a clear vision for how the offices in each governorate should be structured, and what projects and issues should be the main focuses. In practice, however, the offices are not coordinated across governorates and do not have standard operating procedures or a general mission from MoHR headquarters in Baghdad, other than the commonality that each office investigates prisons and detention facilities. Within the governorates, the offices are generally small with staff ranging from six to nineteen people, and each office seems to focus on different projects. Through engagement with PRTs across the country, we are able to get a better picture of who comprises the offices, what they do, and how they operate. END SUMMARY.

DG OF GOVERNORATE AFFAIRS

12. (C) The Directorate General (DG) of Governorate Affairs is one of eight DG's in the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR). Ghanim Al-Shemari has been the Director General of Governorate Affairs since September 2007, but confessed to PolOff in February that he is still working on establishing standard operating procedures for the provincial offices. He envisions each office eventually resembling the MoHR in miniature, with, for example, a legal office, a detentions and prisons office, a mass graves section, and an office that handles promoting human rights awareness. Ghanim also listed three top priorities for the offices: 1) investigating mass graves, 2) promoting human rights awareness including the rights of women, and 3) prison monitoring. While these goals for establishing standard structures and mission goals are impressive, they are still only a vision that requires implementation. He did admit that the Ministry faces obstacles, such as a lack of training for MoHR officials in the governorates on how to teach Iraqis about human rights, how to monitor prisons, and how to report accurately on conditions in the provinces. The Ministry also does not have full staffing in the offices and so cannot pursue all the goals.

OFFICE STRUCTURES AND PROJECTS

13. (C) Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim told PolOff that the provincial offices all inspect detention facilities and follow a set of guidelines when inspecting prisons. The Salah ad-Din office described to PRTOffs guidelines, which consist of 17 specific questions to ask, including if prisoners are legally incarcerated; capacity and population size; condition of the facility; availability of clean water, cleaning supplies, food, and health care; family visitation opportunities; medical team composition; and overall recommendations to Minister Wijdan. However, the Salah ad-Din Director doubted the effectiveness of the office,s

reports and recommendations, and if the Minister followed up on any allegations. While almost all offices include a prison and detention component in their operations, they differ in the particular projects and goals that they pursue.

¶4. (C) The Salah ad-Din office has six staff and is under the direction of a female attorney, Israa Farhan. The office focuses on past regime crimes; IDPs; oversight of hospitals, schools, and social service providers; and national reconciliation. However, security conditions have hindered their efforts to do prison inspections outside of Tikrit.

¶5. (C) The Dhi Qar MoHR office, headed by Mohammed Bahar, has a staff of ten, including six lawyers, and is located in a small rented house due to a lack of a government-provided building. The office's goals focus on raising human rights awareness through training and seminars for Iraqis, and the office is also working with the Iraqi Red Crescent to deliver food to IDPs.

¶6. (C) The Mosul MoHR office has six staff, headed by Nashwan Salem. They visit IDP camps around the province and conduct inspections of prisons and detention facilities. The office also acts as a liaison for families of Coalition-held detainees. It is focusing on a few projects, such as training juvenile justice staff on how to properly manage juvenile detainees, helping detainees monitor their health conditions, and providing medicine for detainees to treat diseases like scabies.

¶7. (C) Mahdi al-Tamimi, the head of the Basrah office, told

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REOOFFs that the office has a particular focus on helping human rights NGOs in the area and would like to host an NGO conference soon. He wants to provide more assistance to the 200-300 active human rights NGOs in Basrah, but he said funding is the primary inhibitor for their activity. The office has been active in the ongoing GOI operations in Basrah and is helping Iraqis file compensation claims against the GOI for damages caused by Iraqi forces during GOI operations in Basrah (reftel). The office has access to Basrah prisons and detention facilities and does frequent inspections. (NOTE: The office has helped in the past to provide visibility on certain issues in Basrah facilities, where the USG has less access. END NOTE.)

¶8. (C) The office in Diwaniyah, under Fadhil Ali al-Qaseer, has 18 staff, which includes administration, drivers, security guards, and four lawyers who do the investigations and advocacy work. The office covers war crimes, prisoner torture and abuse, IDPs, a lack of essential services (food, shelter, potable water), and other human rights violations; it sends monthly reports to Baghdad. The director said that the main focus is spreading awareness of basic freedoms and rights, and that they recently hosted a conference on the issue. He said that the office does not receive enough funding or support from the ministry to cover the whole province. The office also recently sponsored a reconciliation workshop.

¶9. (C) In Wasit province, the office encompasses eight staff and is headed by Abdel Ridha al-Badri. This branch seems the most structured and has nine committees, including prisons and detainees, women and children, housing, victims of terrorism, IDPs, mass graves, legislative affairs, social affairs, and minority affairs. The Wasit office will also be hosting a reconciliation conference on May 19, although reconciliation does not fit in one of the nine departments in the Wasit office.

¶10. (C) The Babil office has a staff of 19, headed by Mohammed Issa, a former human rights NGO representative, and has an operating budget of 117M ID (less than USD 100,000) per year. The office focuses mostly on monitoring the 18

detention facilities and prison in Hillah. It is also responsible for covering IDP issues, human rights violations in other ministries, investigating mass graves, and visiting ethnic and religious centers. However, the director complained of the ambiguity of his office's responsibilities.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: We are unsure of the overall effectiveness of the MoHR offices in the governorates, and some reporting indicates they do not have amicable relationships with the provincial governments. They do not seem to have a significant presence or influence within the provinces, probably due to the limited number of staff, limited resources, and lack of substantial training in the subject areas. We will continue engaging the local offices and try to include them in PRT projects and workshops. Several office directors expressed interest in attending PRT workshops and working more closely with them. By understanding what the offices are doing and what they are lacking, Post can help coordinate USG and international donor support and capacity-building projects for the ministry.

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